

## CLAIMS

The invention claimed is:

1. A method of unloading elongated rails from a railcar traveling on track on a railway bed, said method comprising the steps of:

feeding a first rail on the railcar into a thread box having a power operated drive for transporting the rails through the thread box and onto the railway bed;

operating said drive of the thread box to transport said first rail through said thread box and onto the railway bed until said first rail is unloaded from the railcar onto the railway bed;

feeding a second rail on the railcar into said thread box; and

operating said drives of the thread box to transport said second rail therethrough while propelling said railcar away from the first rail along the track at a speed sufficient to maintain said second rail substantially end to end with said first rail, thereby unloading said second rail from the railcar onto the railway bed with the first and second rails positioned on the railway bed substantially end to end.

2. A method of unloading elongated rails from a railcar which travels on track on a railway bed, comprising the steps of:

feeding a first rail on the railcar into a first thread box having a power operated drive for transporting the rails through said first thread box and onto the railway bed;

feeding a second rail on the railcar into a second thread box located sidewardly from the first thread box and having a power operated drive for transporting the rails through said second thread box and onto the railway bed;

operating said drives of the first and second thread boxes to transport the respective first and second rails therethrough and onto the railway bed at locations spaced apart sidewardly until said first and second rails are unloaded from the railcar onto the railway bed;

feeding a third rail on the railcar into said first thread box;

feeding a fourth rail on the railcar into said second thread box;

operating said drive of the first and second thread boxes to transport the respective third and fourth rails therethrough while propelling said railcar away from the first and second rails along the track at a speed sufficient to maintain said third rail substantially end to end with said first rail and said fourth rail substantially end to end with said second rail, thereby unloading said third and fourth rails from the railcar onto the railway bed with the first and third rails positioned on the railway bed substantially end to end and the second and fourth rails positioned on the railway bed substantially end to end.

3. Apparatus for unloading elongated rails from a railcar traveling on track on a railway bed, said apparatus comprising:

a frame having flanged wheels for travel on the track and means for coupling said frame to the railcar;

a gantry crane mounted on said frame for travel thereon generally parallel to the track and having a boom equipped with a grip for gripping the rails on said railcar;

at least one power driven thread box on said frame for receiving the rails delivered to said thread box by said boom; and

drive means associated with said thread box, said drive means being power operated and being operable to feed said rails through the thread box from the railcar onto the railway bed.

4. Apparatus as set forth in claim 3, wherein:

said thread box includes a pair of rollers for gripping between them a rail fed into the thread box; and

said drive means includes a power actuator driving at least one of said rollers when activated.

5. Apparatus as set forth in claim 3, including:

a wheel assembly mounted for movement on said frame between an extended position and a retracted position, said wheel assembly having a plurality of roadway wheels engageable with a roadway in the extended position to accommodate travel of said frame on the roadway with said flanged wheels elevated above the roadway in the extended position, and said roadway wheels being elevated above the roadway and track in the retracted position to engage the flanged wheels with the track;

a power system for moving said wheel assembly between said extended and retracted positions; and

a detachable hitch on said frame allowing the frame to be hitched to a drive vehicle for towing the frame on the roadway to the track in the extended position of said wheel assembly and placing the frame on the track with said wheel assembly in the retracted position.

6. Apparatus as set forth in claim 3, including:

a second power driven thread box on said frame located generally behind and below said at least one thread box, said second thread box being adapted to receive rails that are fed through said at least one thread box; and

drive means for said second thread box operable to feed said rails through said second thread box away from the railcar.

7. Apparatus as set forth in claim 6, including:

a third power driven thread box on the frame located generally behind said second thread box for receiving rails fed therethrough; and

drive means for said third thread box operable to feed said rails through said third thread box and onto the railway bed.

8. Apparatus for unloading elongated rails from a railcar which travels on track on a railway bed and on which the rails are carried in pairs, said apparatus comprising:

a frame having flanged wheels for travel on the track and means for coupling said frame to the railcar;

a gantry crane mounted on said frame for travel thereon generally parallel to the track and having a boom carrying a grip for gripping the rails carried on the railcar;

a pair of power driven thread boxes on said frame spaced transversely apart thereon to receive the respective rails in each pair thereof delivered to the thread boxes by said boom; and

power operated drive means for each thread box acting when energized to feed the rails through the thread boxes from the railcar onto the railway bed.

9. Apparatus as set forth in claim 8, including:

a wheel assembly mounted for movement on said frame between an extended position and a retracted position, said wheel assembly having a plurality of roadway wheels engageable with a roadway in the extended position to accommodate travel of said frame on the roadway with said flanged wheels elevated above the roadway in the extended position, and said roadway wheels being elevated above the roadway and track in the retracted position to engage the flanged wheels with the track;

a power system for moving said wheel assembly between said extended and retracted positions; and

a detachable hitch on said frame allowing the frame to be hitched to a drive vehicle for towing the frame on the roadway to the track in the extended position of said wheel assembly and placing the frame on the track with said wheel assembly in the retracted position.

10. Apparatus as set forth in claim 8, wherein:

each thread box includes a pair of rollers for gripping between them a rail fed into the thread box; and

each drive means includes a power actuator for driving at least one of said rollers of each thread box.

11. Apparatus as set forth in claim 8, including:

a second pair of power driven thread boxes on said frame at locations generally behind and below the respective thread boxes in said pair thereof, each thread box in said second pair being arranged to receive rails fed thereto by the corresponding thread box in said pair thereof; and

power operated drive means for each thread box in said second pair arranged to feed said rails through each thread box in said second pair.